

1654

THE CAUSES :: OF WAR ::

PRICE ONE PENNY.

The National Labour Press, Ltd., 30, Blackfriars Street, Manchester; St. Bride's House, Salisbury Square, London, E.C.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2014

<https://archive.org/details/causesofwar00unse>

The Causes of War.

"All mankind pay homage to peace with their lips. Some of us pay homage to it with our hearts also, even with our heart of hearts; and some, again, pay equal homage to it in the abstract with their heads. But when we come to the concrete world of human passion and human ambition we begin to find that the homage which some men and some nations pay to peace with their lips is a hypocritical homage in which their heart has no share nor their understanding any belief."

(*The Times* Literary Supplement. Sept. 10th, 1914).

The primary cause of war is the fact that many people like fighting. When war breaks out, numbers of men are eager to be at the front. The newspapers report cases where men have committed suicide because they have been refused for active service. Wounded men often state that they are anxious to be at the front again.

All proposals for establishing peace which are based upon the assumption that because war is terrible it is therefore disliked by all civilised beings are likely to be inadequate. Those who hold that war should no longer exist between civilised nations—that is to say the class of people who have some moral feelings—must learn to recognise the fact that war is anxiously desired and steadily worked for by hundreds and thousands of the inhabitants of Western Europe. The means which such persons use to promote war I will discuss later. I will first inquire, Who desire war? and for what reasons? Who desire peace?

Many non-combatants think peace an evil and war a good thing in itself. The Mid-Victorian Official Poet, writing in support of the Crimean War, eloquently expresses his horror of peace, and, apparently, did not know why we were fighting.* This opinion is certainly not uncommon. It is curious that the wish for war should persist so strongly among civilised people.

Fighting is the soldier's trade. How is it possible that a young man, keen on his profession, devoting his best energies to studying the arts of war, should not desire to have actual experience? We all know how keen young officers are anxious to go to the front whenever there is a war in any part of the British Empire. On the occasion of the Dogger Bank incident a British Admiral signalled "Situation critical. Good luck!" If this is true, it follows that the larger the number of professional soldiers the larger the number of persons who ardently desire war is likely to be—although in a country which imposes universal military service there must be thousands of men in the ranks who hate war. Nor do all professional soldiers like war. Many brave soldiers hate war. They know its horrors, though they do not talk about them. They have a noble sense of duty which makes them willing to endure and to lay down their lives for their country. The number of these at a time of national emergency is a thing to be proud of. They are some of the finest men of a nation—if they are killed the whole moral standard of the nation is lowered.

Those who are interested in making armaments have a direct economic interest in war. Under Company results published in the *Times* we find, since the outbreak of the war, a heading in

* Maud.

large type "Important Armament Dividends." We are told that for the first time since October, 1907, Cammell, Laird, and Co. are paying an interim dividend on their ordinary shares. From the same column we learn that ordinary shareholders in the Birmingham Small Arms Company receive 15 per cent.; those in Sir W. G. Armstrong, Whitworth & Co., 10 per cent.

The desire for prestige is a motive for war. Most people wish to belong to a powerful nation—a nation which can bully weaker nations and which does so to prove that it can. To wage a successful war is the best method of demonstrating power. The nature of prestige cannot be discussed here; but it is, I consider, clear that the prestige of a nation does not now depend upon its services to humanity or culture, or upon its level of civilisation.

It is natural that people should like to belong to a strong nation, but why they should care merely about their nation being strong and not care nearly so much about their nation being honourable, or humane, is not easily answered. Can it come from the fact that Europe has considered the Old Testament as a moral book? But whatever may be the psychology of prestige, the fact remains that force is its test. Japan is respected not for her art and civilisation, but for her military qualities.

Many historians like war, or at any rate, the idea of war. History books are full of moral judgments, but these do not include a condemnation of war. The historian usually finds war the most interesting topic with which he deals.

Many people like excitement. These like the idea of war, even if they do not like war. War is for many people the most exciting thing that they know of. In Europe, the rich as well as

the poor are singularly uncultivated—by this I mean that they are unable to appreciate all those many and varied satisfactions of a high kind which our civilisation can offer. The pleasures of the mind, the enjoyment of beauty, the pursuit of truth, all are considered of no importance by those who seek for satisfaction in watching horse races or football matches, in gambling or drinking. To persons thus dulled anything which offers excitement may well appear to be a good. War is supremely exciting. For this reason some desire, many do not dislike war, regarding its consequences as little as the man who drinks reflects on the headache next morning, or the man who bets reflects that he may bring ruin on his wife and family.

Many persons hate social and political reform. Those who enjoy unearned income are in all countries the driving force of the political party of reaction. The distribution of wealth is evidently unjust; in most countries there has been a growing demand by the working classes that a greater share of the national income should go to those who work for it. This demand, if it could be made effective, would endanger the privileged position of those who enjoy unearned income. War causes much economic ruin, but the class who bear the brunt are the workers. Hence war is an admirable antidote to social reform. It may be an antidote to any serious internal upheaval in a country. This war may have stopped civil war in Ireland. A writer in the *Times* of September 9th, 1914, says “Austria, herself, must have been aware of the folly of the war. The only feasible explanation of her act is that she was faced by a grave internal crisis!”

There were some slight signs that the state of affairs in Russia

might become a little less hideous than has been. The war has given the Russian Government a great opportunity for greater oppression. A letter, dated September 4th, in the *Daily News*, states that "All Labour papers, with one or two provincial exceptions have been suppressed," and gives details of the arrest of prominent Russians. If what the poet calls "ignoble peace" subsists for a long time it becomes more difficult to resist a demand for social reform or political freedom. Duty and discipline may be used as a check to the decencies of a civilised existence.

What classes are against war? It is highly probable that non-combatants in a country which has been the scene of actual warfare have experienced such horrors that they ardently desire that there shall be no recurrence of war in their own country. Even this may not be true of the less civilised States of Eastern Europe. Yet the desire for revenge sometimes inspires non-combatants (who have experienced war) and their descendants (who have not) to wish that the country which inflicted the horrors of war should suffer them. There is ground for supposing that some French non-combatants are anxious that the sufferings which their ancestors suffered in 1870 should be avenged by making the descendants of those who inflicted them suffer in a similar manner.

But I believe that those non-combatants who actively desire not to have war are, as a rule, politically weak; and, when the actual horrors of war have not been experienced, are by no means such a large class as is sometimes supposed by lovers of peace.

But there are many people who neither ardently desire war nor ardently desire peace, but who are easily worked up to like

war. They see some of the evils of war, but they consider that it has compensations. How far are they right? Most people would admit that war implies certain evils—the destruction of property and commerce—the death of women and children—great physical suffering—much disease. But it is said that the development of certain fine qualities which may collectively be called “heroism” outweighs these evils. The fallacy is, I consider, two-fold. First, that many acts committed in war do not and cannot develop heroic qualities. The moral effect of the burning of Louvain must, I imagine, have produced deplorable moral results, both on the inhabitants of that city and on the soldiers who carried out the work of destruction. Yet this is only an instance on a large scale of what happens in all wars in, I hope, a lesser degree. The burning of farms in South Africa cannot have had a good moral effect on the non-combatants who occupied them or the soldiers who burnt them. (The argument is not affected by the fact that one of these operations may have been necessary and the other not.)

Secondly, heroic qualities are exhibited it is true, but they were already there. It is the character of the man who is heroic which is good. To kill a man who is capable of performing a deed of heroism is an evil. After a war there are less people of heroic character than there were before.

I cannot believe that the good qualities called out by war can ever outweigh the evil moral results. The passions aroused in the non-combatants are, so far as I can observe, almost entirely evil. It certainly seems to me quite impossible that the good can ever outweigh the evil moral results with the suffering and misery added.

I will refer to those who actively desire war as the warlike classes; if these formed the great majority of the population the conditions of Western Europe would resemble that of Albania. How do they produce war? The first means by which the warlike classes promote war is fear. The warlike classes of one nation are continually telling the rest of the population that unless the Army or Navy is increased they will be attacked by a neighbouring nation. Those in the neighbouring nation do the same. As the armaments grow so does the fear. Each side exaggerates the danger. The warlike classes of both nations proclaim that war is inevitable and rouse the feelings of pugnacity. The professions of each side that preparations are peaceful—for defence and not for aggression—are not believed by the other side. By these means the warlike classes can in time succeed in creating war. In their action they are ably assisted by the great armament firms—who supply arms indifferently to all countries, have a close co-operation of interests, and cause scares by inserting false statements in the Press.

The Press do all they can to increase the tension and to rouse those classes who normally neither desire nor dislike war. Under these conditions the thirst for excitement, the desire to read about (if not to perform) acts of personal bravery, outweigh, not only ignoble fear on the part of those who may have to fight, but, in fighters and non-combatants alike, all sense of the wickedness of two sets of persons who have no personal quarrel, killing and maiming one another for no valuable end. Nowadays most people recognise that the Crimean War was senseless. Yet none of the brave French, English, and Russians who then were killing and

maiming one another can have felt, at the time, that they were performing other than splendid deeds; and probably few persons then could have said, or even had the curiosity to inquire, what were the reasons why Frenchmen and Englishmen were killing Russians and *vice versa*.

In order to persuade people to like war the historians, the Press, and other members of the warlike classes naturally make use of the argument that war calls forth heroism. Heroic deeds are recorded; shameful, cowardly, and barbarous acts are not—by the nations who perpetrate them. So that, since few persons hear of events except from the point of view of their own side, there is strong tendency to exaggerate the proportion of good to evil. This may not apply to the less civilised nations of Western Europe. The atrocities of the Balkan War seem to have been considered glorious deeds by those who committed them. Those who do not share this view will feel that amongst such nations war produces evil, and not good, moral results.

Education is used as a means to produce war. It makes every schoolboy believe that military heroes are infinitely greater and better men than Darwin, Newton, Dante, Goethe, or Socrates. The grown man, if he has gone straight from school to business differs little from the schoolboy except in his greater incapacity to receive new ideas. History is often taught as if nothing mattered but bloodshed and monarchs. A great crime or treachery is condoned if it is successful. Frederick the Great was the direct cause of the death of a million human beings and of untold misery because he treacherously seized Silesia, asserting that he had a claim—it was a very shadowy one—to some Silesian Duchies.

Yet Carlyle—who is often considered a moral writer—highly approves of Frederick and points out with evident glee that Silesia has ever since been part of Prussia. The battle of Copenhagen is always treated as one of the glorious deeds of the past—yet it is difficult to see how a sudden attack upon the Navy of a nation with whom we were at peace can be justified morally on the ground of military necessity, any more than Germany's crime of infringing the neutrality of Belgium can be justified upon the same ground.

Historians are so carried away by the pleasure which they derive from describing military operations that they are led to think that war is the finest of all human activities. If history had never been written war would have been less. It inflames national and race hatred; it inspires the idea of revenge. The warlike classes utilise this ignoble motive to the full. General Joffre, in his manifesto to the French troops, definitely appeals to this motive. Bismarck, remembering the horrors of the war in the Palatinate, told Thiers in 1870 that the Germans were waging war against Louis XIV.

History can be, and is, often written by persons of small intelligence, devoid of high moral ideas. History is not and generally can never be truthful. The patriotism of historians is a deadly foe to truth and morals. Diplomacy, as at present conducted, is also well devised to promote war. Ambassadors are not ashamed to lie to, or to trick other ambassadors; they use spies and secret agents. Modern diplomacy still rests on the ridiculous fiction that it is an affair of the Sovereign and not of the nation, so that treaties and engagements are made of which the nation is unaware, but by which it is bound. This enables the

diplomats who belong to the wealthy classes, and by their practice are mutually suspicious of each other, to make secret arrangements, which may force nations, however unwillingly, into war. The diplomatist thinks in terms of States, and cares but little for the human beings who inhabit them.

Thus, although it may be that in Western Europe the majority of the people do not, at any rate actively, like war—and on sober reflection many know that it is like to bring misery and ruin on them—yet the warlike classes, by using the means I have indicated, can be successful in promoting war. Some of the means they use could clearly be abolished. Private armament firms, conscription, large armaments, secret diplomacy, false statements in the Press, a teaching of history which is devoid of truth and morals do not appear to me to be an essential part of European civilisation. But I doubt whether war will finally cease in Europe until people believe that love is better than hate and act in accordance with this belief.

C.P.S.

A WORLD-WIDE PEACE is one,
amongst many, of the objects for
which Socialists are working. To
understand the Socialist Movement, its aims,
its ideals, its progress, and its prospects, you
must study the work of Socialist writers.
A full list of these publications can be
obtained from

THE NATIONAL LABOUR PRESS, Ltd.

30, Blackfriars Street, Manchester; and St.

Bride's House, Salisbury Square, London, E.C.

THE SOCIALIST LIBRARY.

A collection of volumes on the various aspects of the Socialist and Labour movement, written by authors of national and international repute, and edited by J. Ramsay MacDonald, M.P. The books contain what is practically the best epitome of Socialist thought and outlook that has been published, and they are undoubtedly the books which should be in the hands of every inquirer after Socialism, every convinced Socialist, and every student of economics.

- Vol. I.—**SOCIALISM AND POSITIVE SCIENCE**, by Enrico Ferri.
 Vol. II.—**SOCIALISM AND SOCIETY**, by J. R. MacDonald, M.P.
 Vol. III.—**STUDIES IN SOCIALISM**, by Jean Jaures.
 Vol. IV.—**WHITE CAPITAL AND COLOURED LABOUR**, by Sir Sydney Olivier, K.C.M.G.
 Vol. V.—**COLLECTIVISM AND INDUSTRIAL EVOLUTION**, by Emile Vandervelde.
 Vol. VI.—**SOCIALISM AND THE DRINK QUESTION**, by Philip Snowden, M.P.
 Vol. VII.—**EVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM**, by Edward Bernstein.
 Vol. VIII.—**SOCIALISM AND GOVERNMENT**, by J. R. MacDonald, M.P. (two parts).
 Vol. IX.—**THE CHILD AND THE STATE**, by Margaret McMillan.
 Extra Volume I.—**THE REVOLUTION OF THE BALTIC PROVINCES OF RUSSIA**. Translated by E. O. F. Ames. Sixteen illustrations.

Volumes I. to VIII., IX., and each part of Volume VIII., are sold in paper editions, 1s. net; Cloth, 1s. 6d. net; postage, 3d. extra.

WAR LITERATURE.

Every phase of war and peace is discussed in these publications and the way to world-wide brotherhood is clearly outlined.

Revised Editions.

THE WAR TRUST EXPOSED.	J. T. W. Newbold.	1d. post free 1½d.
HOW ASQUITH HELPED THE ARMOUR RING	J. T. W. Newbold	1d. „ „ 1½d.
MODERN WARS AND THE PEACE IDEAL	Norman Angell	1d. „ „ 1½d.
DREADNOUGHTS AND DIVIDENDS.	Philip Snowden, M.P.	1d. „ „ 1½d.
WAR AND THE WORKERS.	Norman Angell ...	3d. „ „ 4d.
THE OTHER ILLUSIONS.	Captain Sir Francis Vane, Bt.	6d. „ „ 8d.

ALL ORDERS TO

THE NATIONAL LABOUR PRESS LTD.,
 30, Blackfriars Street, Manchester; St. Bride's
 House, Salisbury Square, Fleet Street, London.

THE

Labour Leader

THE JOURNAL WITH
A PRACTICAL PEACE

:: :: POLICY :: ::

Order it from your Newsagent, or send 1d. stamp
for specimen copy to

THE PUBLISHER, "LABOUR LEADER,"
30, BLACKFRIARS ST., MANCHESTER.

Every Thursday : One Penny.

WE CAN PRINT ::

Anything from a
BUSINESS CARD
to a NEWSPAPER

We Produce Good Work at
Reasonable Prices and under
the Best Labour Conditions



SEND YOUR INQUIRIES TO

The National Labour Press Ltd.
30, Blackfriars Street, Manchester

Telephone : City 5206-7.

Telegrams : "Democracy."



THE NATIONAL LABOUR PRESS LTD,
MANCHESTER AND LONDON

16067